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(54) **CHECKOUT STATION WITH HANGER HOOK**

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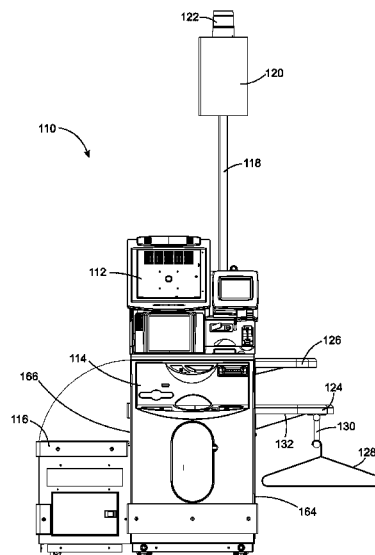
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Described is a checkout station that includes a hanger hook coupled to a platform. The hanger hook is used to hang empty clothes hangers on, so the hangers can be collected and held in one location until they are re-used or disposed of. The hanger hook can be a U-shaped elongate member with a curved bottom piece, a first side, and a second side. The first side and the second side are each coupled to the bottom piece to form the “U” shape. The first side couples to the register stand, and hangers are hung from the second side. Having the hanger hook at the checkout station makes it easy for employees and customers to hang empty hangers on the hanger hook so the hangers are collected and do not end up on the floor or cluttering the work spaces of the checkout station.

8 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



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 See application file for complete search history.

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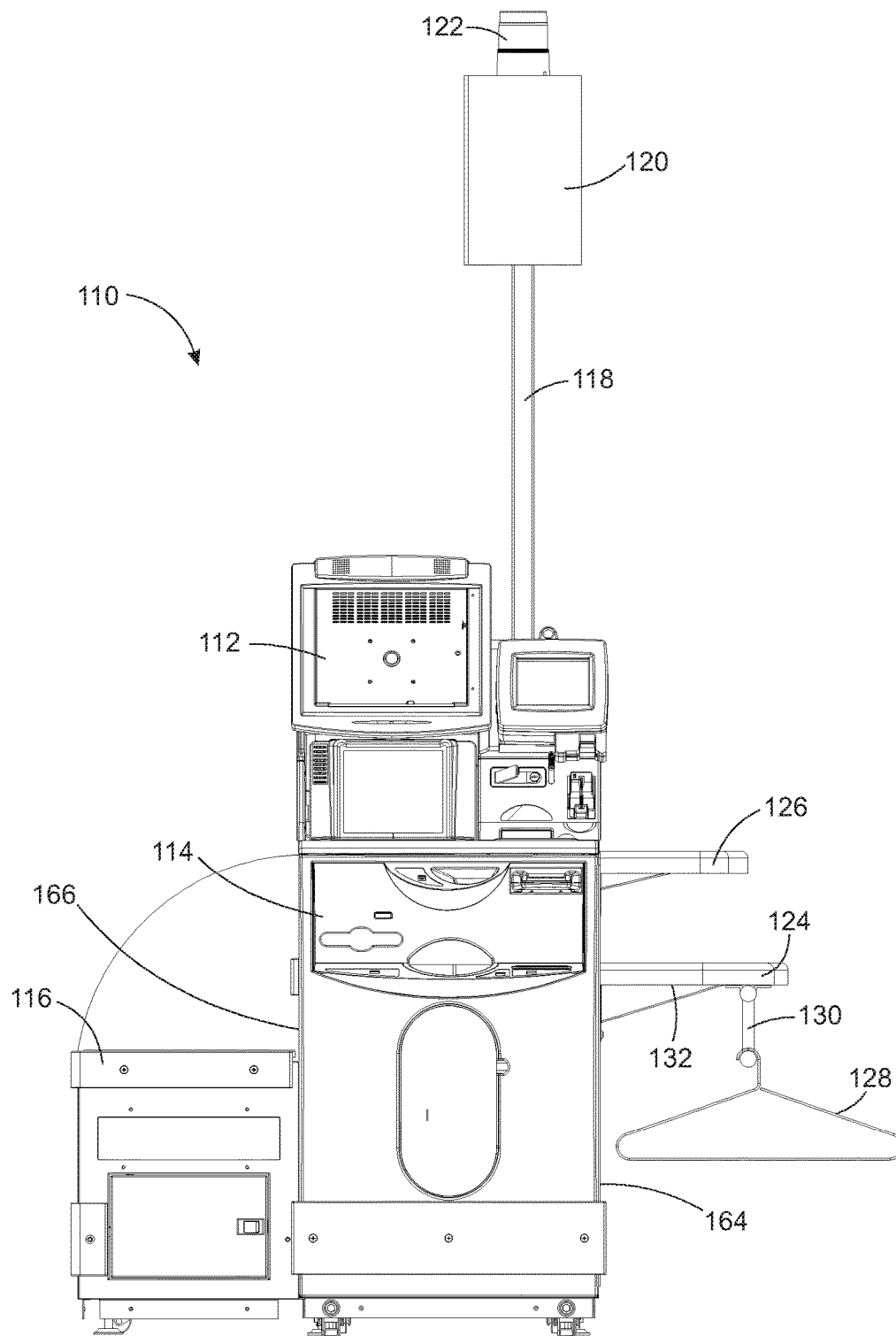


FIG. 1

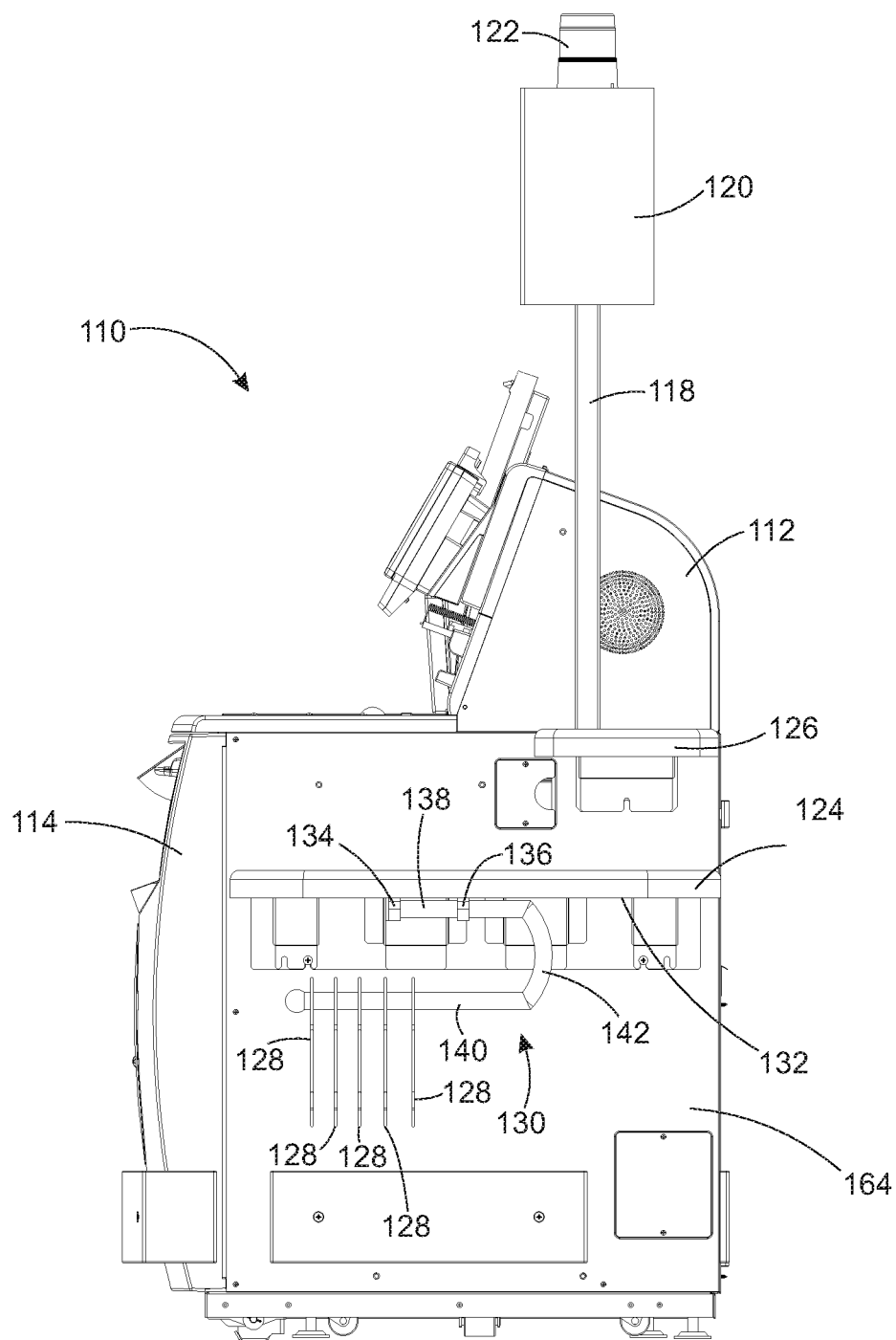
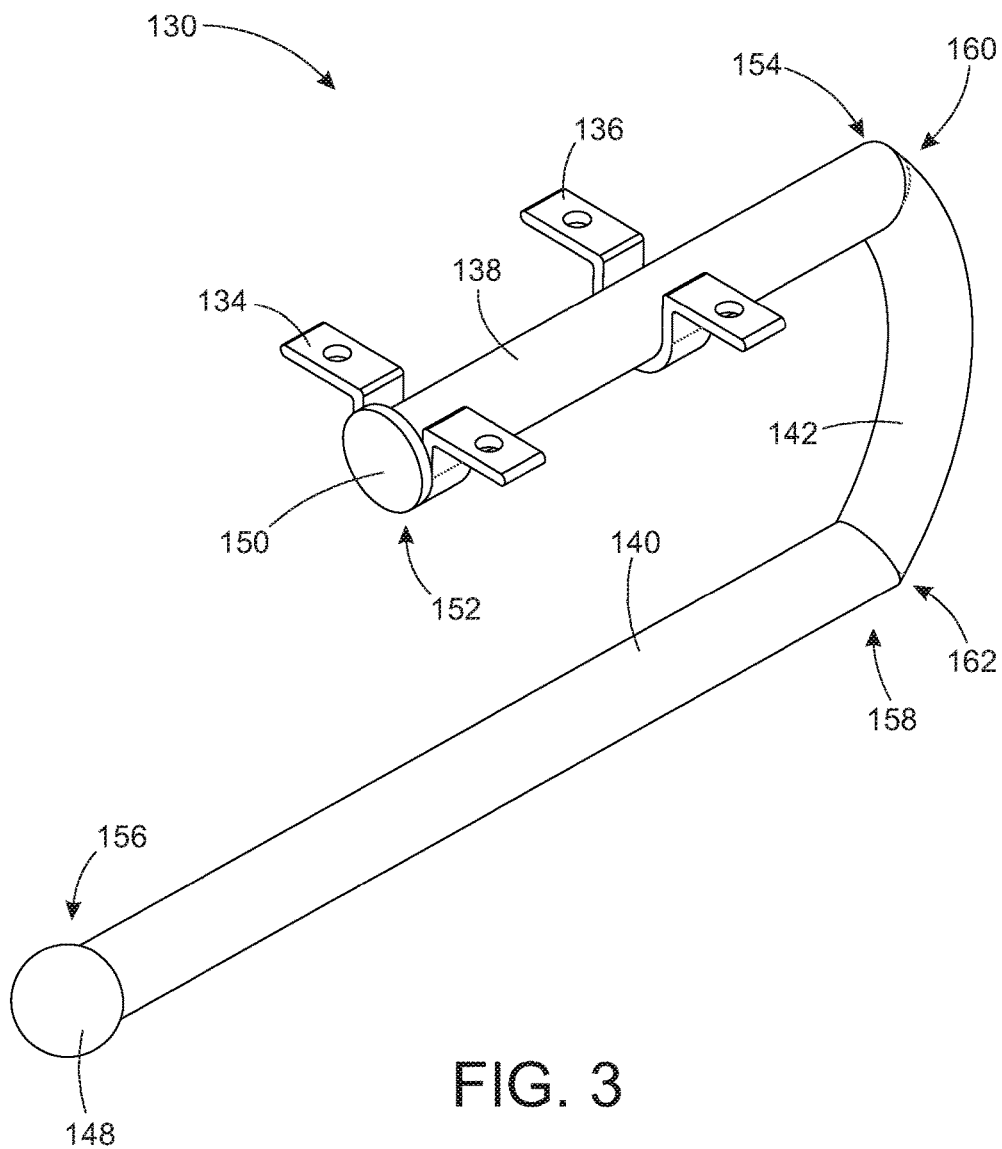


FIG. 2



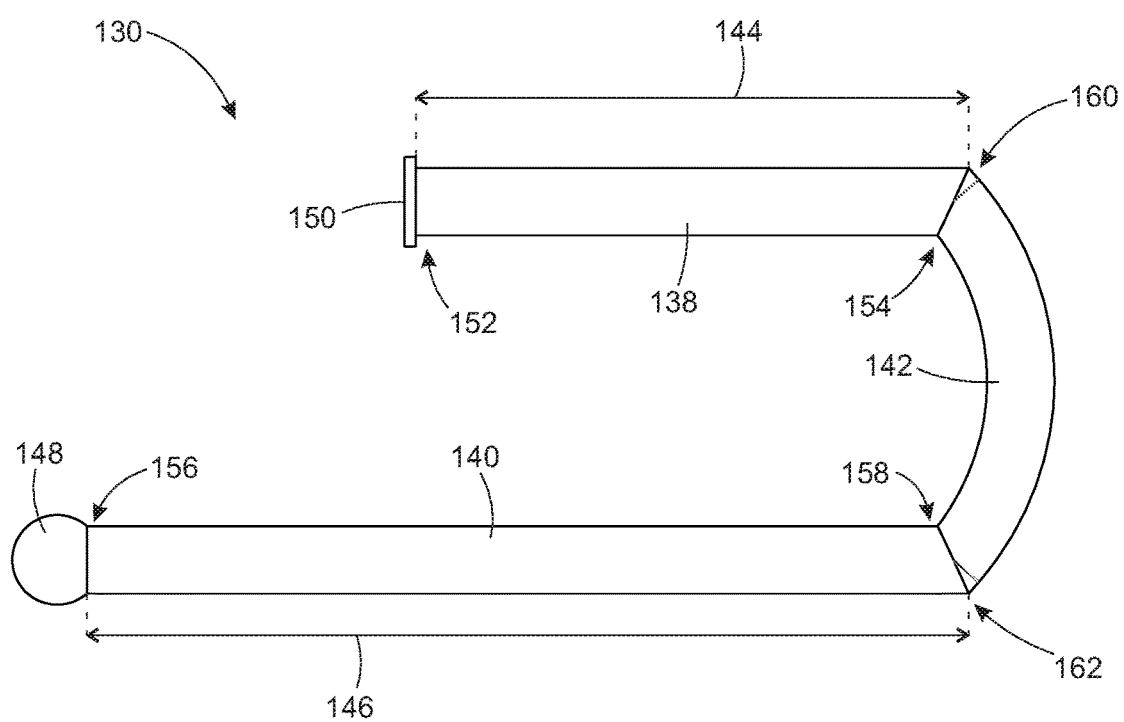


FIG. 4

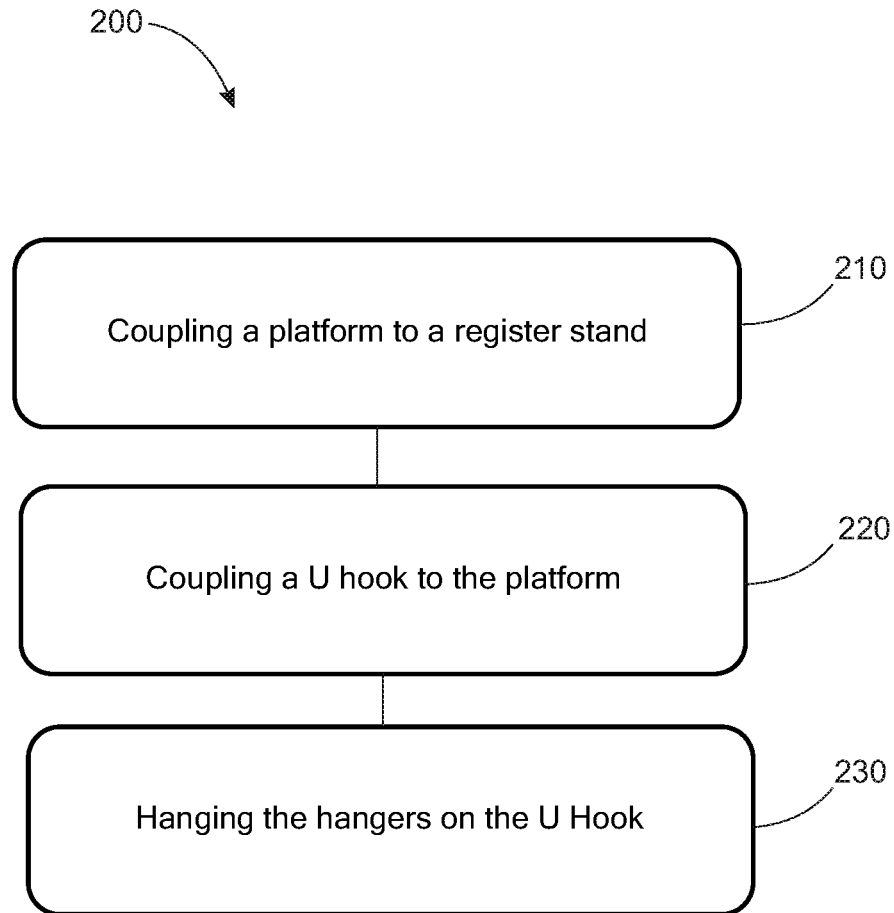


FIG. 5

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CHECKOUT STATION WITH HANGER HOOK

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This invention claims priority to U.S. provisional patent application Ser. No. 62/456,403, filed Feb. 8, 2017 to Applicant Wal-Mart Stores Inc., and entitled “Checkout Station with Hanger Hook”, which is incorporated entirely herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Technical Field

This invention relates to checkout stations in retail stores, specifically, to a checkout station with a hook for receiving hangers.

State of the Art

Checkout stations are locations in a retail store where customers can pay for and bag their purchased items. Checkout stations can be run by an employee of the retail store, or they can be self-checkout stations where the customer performs the checkout tasks themselves. Products such as clothing are often hung on hangers in the retail store. If the hangers are not taken by the customer, then the products are removed from the hangers at the checkout station, and the hangers left behind. Hangers that are left behind by the customer can clutter up register space or fall on the ground, leaving a messy and dangerous area.

Accordingly, what is needed is a device for storing hangers at a checkout station, which is convenient for both customers and employees to use.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 shows a front view of an embodiment of a checkout station that includes an embodiment of a hook for receiving hangers;

FIG. 2 shows a side view of the checkout station of FIG. 1 that includes the hook for receiving hangers;

FIG. 3 shows a perspective view of an embodiment of a U-hook;

FIG. 4 shows a side view of the U-hook of FIG. 3; and

FIG. 5 illustrates a method of storing hangers at a checkout station.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

As discussed above, embodiments of the present invention relate to checkout stations in retail stores, specifically, to a checkout station with a hook for holding hangers.

When products are brought to a checkout station in a retail store to be paid for and bagged, some of the items, such as clothes, for example, may need to be removed from their hanger and the hanger left at the checkout station. What is needed is a device for holding the empty clothes hangers or other types of hangers at the checkout station. Disclosed is a checkout station that includes a register stand, a platform coupled to the register stand, and a hanger hook coupled to the platform. Empty clothes hangers, or other hangers, are hung on the hanger hook to store the hangers. The hanger hook holds the hangers until they are collected and re-used

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or disposed of. The hanger hook is in a convenient location at the checkout station so that both employees who are working at the checkout station, and customers who are performing their own checkout duties, can find and use the hanger hook to hang the empty hangers on. Customers can easily remove the clothes from the hanger, hang the empty hanger on the hanger hook, and put the clothes in their bag for removal from the store. Cashiers or other employees checking out customers at the checkout station can easily remove the clothes or other items from the hanger, and hang the hanger on the hanger hook. In some embodiments, the hanger hook is a U hook—a U-shaped hook with a first side, a second side, and a bottom piece connecting the first side to the second side. The first side couples to the register stand, and hangers are hung from the second side. Having the U hook at the checkout station makes it easy for employees and customers to hang empty hangers on the U hook so the hangers are collected and do not end up on the floor or cluttering the work spaces of the checkout station.

FIG. 1 and FIG. 2 show an embodiment of a checkout station 110 with a U hook 130 for collecting hangers. FIG. 1 shows a front view of checkout station 110. FIG. 2 shows a side view of checkout station 110. FIGS. 3 and 4 show details of U hook 130. FIG. 3 shows a perspective view of U hook 130. FIG. 4 shows a side view of U hook 130.

Checkout station 110 shown in FIG. 1 and FIG. 2 is a self-checkout station in this embodiment, but this is not meant to be limiting. U hook 130 can be used at any checkout station, including self-checkout stations or employee-run checkout stations. Any checkout station where hangers of any type may need to be collected can use U hook 130. U hook 130 is one embodiment of a hanger hook, but this is not meant to be limiting. Any type of hook that can hold hangers, such as but not limited to, a J hook, a V hook, or any other hook that can hold hangers, can be substituted for U hook 130.

Checkout stations are places in a retail store where purchases are paid for and bagged. Products hung on hangers are often removed from the hanger at the checkout station so that it is more convenient for the product to be folded and carried home. Hangers tend to build up at checkout stations and cover table surfaces or platforms, or end up on the ground, which can make the checkout station look unkempt and can be dangerous if customers or employees trip or slide on hangers. It is desirable to have a device at each checkout station for collecting hangers.

Checkout station 110 includes a checkout register 112. Checkout register 112 is used to document items purchased and add up the total cost of the purchases. Checkout register 112 sits on a register stand 114. Register stand 114 is used to support checkout register 112. Register stand 114 in this embodiment is on wheels, but this is not meant to be limiting. Register stand 114 has a register stand first side 164 and a register stand second side 166, as shown in FIG. 1 and FIG. 2. Checkout station 110 also includes a scale 116. Scale 116 is used to weigh purchases so that the retail store can verify that all items in the bags have been entered into checkout register 112. Scale 116 is coupled to register stand second side 166. A light pole 118 is coupled to register stand 114. Light pole 118 holds a light fixture 120 with a light emitter 122. Light fixture 120 and light emitter 122 are used to emit light that can provide an indication of the status of the checkout station, or provide other light-based communications.

Checkout station 110 includes two platforms 124 and 126 coupled to register stand 114. Platforms 124 and 126 can be used for many different purposes, but are often used as a

place for customers to set a purse or wallet, for example, or a place for a customer to use as a surface for writing a check. Platforms **124** and **126** are coupled to register stand first side **164**, in this embodiment.

It is to be understood that checkout station **110** is only an example of one embodiment of a checkout station used in retail stores, and that U hook **130**, or a different embodiment of a hanger hook, can be used at any type or configuration of checkout station.

Checkout station **110** includes a hanger hook coupled to platform **124**. In this embodiment, the hanger hook is U hook **130** coupled to a bottom surface **132** of platform **124**. U hook **130** is a hanger hook for receiving at least one hanger **128**. Hangers of many types can be hung on U hook **130**. A number of clothes hangers **128** are shown hanging from U hook **130**, but it is to be understood that many different types of hangers can be hung from U hook **130**. U hook **130** receives at least one hanger **128**. Hanger **128** is stored on U hook **130** until hanger **128** is collected for re-use or disposal. U hook **130** provides a convenient location for hanging at least one hanger **128**. U hook **130** is a means for collecting hangers **128**. U hook **130** collects hangers **128** so that hangers **128** do not pile up on platforms **124** or **126**, or end up on the floor. In some embodiments, a hanger hook other than U hook **130** is used in place of U hook **130**. U hook **130** can be replaced with any hanger hook that can hold hangers, such as a J hook, a V hook, or any other hanger hook. In some embodiments, U hook **130**, or a different type of hanger hook, is coupled to register stand **114** instead of platform **124**. In some embodiments, U hook **130**, or a different type of hanger hook, is coupled to other parts of checkout station **110**.

Checkout station **110** also includes a first strap **134** and a second strap **136**. First strap **134** and second strap **136** are a means to couple U hook **130** to platform **124** and register stand **114** of checkout station **110**. In this embodiment, first strap **134** and second strap **136** are a first and a second means to couple U hook **130** to platform **124** and register stand **114** of checkout station **110**. First strap **134** and second strap **136** are strips of metal or other rigid or semi-rigid material formed into a shape that will couple U hook **130** to bottom surface **132**, as shown in FIG. 2 and FIG. 3. In this embodiment, each of first strap **134** and second strap **136** are formed to include a u-shaped portion that wraps around U-hook **130**, with a tab at either end of the u-shaped portion. The tabs at either end couple to platform **124**. First strap **134** and second strap **136** in this embodiment are screwed into bottom surface **132** through holes in first strap **134** and second strap **136**, but this is not meant to be limiting. Many different types of couplers can be used as a means to couple U hook **130** to bottom surface **132** of platform **124**.

FIG. 3 and FIG. 4 shows details of U hook **130**. U hook **130** is a U-shaped elongate member with a first side **138**, a second side **140**, and a bottom piece **142**. Bottom piece **142** forms the bottom of the “U” shape of U hook **130**. Bottom piece **142** is curved, as shown in FIG. 3 and FIG. 4. Bottom piece **142** couples first side **138** to second side **140**. Bottom piece **142** has a bottom piece first end **160** and a bottom piece second end **162** opposing bottom piece first end **160**.

First side **138** is formed of a first elongate member having a first side first end **152** and a first side second end **154** opposing first side first end **152**. First side **138** is straight and tubular in shape, meaning first side **138** has a circular cross-section. First side second end **154** is coupled to bottom piece first end **160**, as shown in the figures. First side **138** is a first side of the “U”. First side **138** is coupled to bottom surface **132** with straps **134** and **136** in this embodi-

ment, but this is not meant to be limiting. In some embodiments, second side **140** is coupled to bottom surface **132**. In some embodiments, first side **138** of U hook **130** is coupled to register stand **114** in a location other than bottom surface **132** of platform **124**. First side first end **152** has a disk shaped end piece **150** coupled to it. Disk shaped end piece **150** is a round flat disk that protects first side first end **152** and helps to make sure first side first end **152** does not cause damage to people, or structures.

Second side **140** is formed of a second elongate member having a second side first end **156** and a second side second end **158** opposing second side first end **156**. Second side **140** is straight and tubular in shape. Second side **140** has a circular cross-section. Second side second end **158** is coupled to bottom piece second end **162**, as shown in FIG. 4. Second side **140** is a second side of the “U” shape of U hook **130**. Second side **140** is the portion of U hook **130** that hangers **128** are hung on, in this embodiment, but this is not meant to be limiting. In some embodiments, second side **140** is coupled to register stand **114** or platform **124**, and first side **138** receives hangers **128**. Second side **140** has a spherical shaped end piece **148** coupled to second side first end **156**. Spherical shaped end piece **148** protects second side first end **156**, ensures that second side first end **156** does not cause damage to people or fixtures, and provides for a smooth surface to hold hangers **128** on second side **140** but still allows hangers **140** to be put on and taken off of second side **140** easily and quickly.

In the embodiment of U hook **130** shown in the figures, first side **138** is shorter than second side **140**, as shown in FIG. 4. First side **138** has a length **144**. Second side **140** has a length **146**. Length **146** is longer than length **144** in this embodiment. Having first side **138** be shorter than second side **140** allows second side **140** to extend out further than first side **138** so that hangers **128** can be easily put on and taken off of second side **140** without having first side **138** getting in the way. First side **138** and second side **140** are parallel to each other, in this embodiment.

Bottom piece **142** is formed of a third elongate member having bottom piece first end **160** and bottom piece second end **162** opposing bottom piece first end **160**. Bottom piece **142** is tubular in shape with a circular cross-section. Bottom piece **142** is curved in this embodiment. Bottom piece first end **160** is coupled to first side second end **154**. Bottom piece second end **162** is coupled to second side second end **158**, as shown in FIG. 3 and FIG. 4.

FIG. 5 illustrates a method **200** of storing hangers at a checkout station of a retail store. Method **200** includes an act **210** of coupling a platform to a register stand. The register stand is the part of the checkout station that supports the register. In some embodiments, the platform is coupled to other portions of the checkout station.

Method **200** also includes an act **220** of coupling a hanger hook to the platform. In some embodiments, a first side of the hanger hook is coupled to the platform, where the first side is shorter than a second side of the hanger hook. In some embodiments, the hanger hook is coupled to the platform of the register stand with at least one strap. In some embodiments, the hanger hook is coupled to the platform of the register stand with two straps. In some embodiments, the hanger hook is coupled to a bottom surface of the platform.

Method **200** also includes an act **230** of hanging the hangers on the hanger hook. The hangers can be clothes hangers or any other type of hanger. In some embodiments, the hangers are hung on a second side of the hanger hook, where the first side is coupled to the register stand. The hangers are hung on the hanger hook until they are collected.

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Hanging the hangers on the hanger hook keeps the hangers from taking up space on the register stand or the platform, or from ending up on the floor.

In some embodiments, method **200** includes coupling a first side and a second side to a bottom piece to form the hanger hook. In some embodiments, the hanger hook is an elongate member formed into a “U” shape. The bottom piece is curved and forms the bottom of the “U”. The first side and the second side are straight, in this embodiment, and form the two sides of the “U”. In this embodiment, the first side is shorter than the second side, but this is not meant to be limiting. The shorter first side is coupled to the register stand in this embodiment so the hangers can be put on and taken off of the second side of the hanger hook without the first side getting in the way. In some embodiments, method **200** includes coupling a disk end piece to a first side first end of the hanger hook. In some embodiments, method **200** includes coupling a spherical end piece to a second side first end of the hanger hook.

A checkout station with a hanger hook for receiving hangers has been shown and described. Hangers tend to build up at checkout stations because they are removed from clothes or other items being purchased and need to be kept somewhere until they are re-used or discarded. Hangers are set on surfaces of the checkout station and get in the way of checkout activities. Alternatively, they can end up on the floor, where they can be a danger to customers or employees. The disclosed hanger hook receives empty hangers and keeps the hangers in a convenient place until the hangers are collected. In some embodiments, the hanger hook is a U-shaped elongate member with a curved bottom piece, and a first and a second straight side piece, each coupled to the curved bottom piece to form the “U” shape. A first side of the U-shaped hanger hook is coupled to a platform of the checkout station. A second side of the U hook receives the hangers.

The embodiments and examples set forth herein were presented in order to best explain the present invention and its practical application and to thereby enable those of ordinary skill in the art to make and use the invention. However, those of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that the foregoing description and examples have been presented for the purposes of illustration and example only. The description as set forth is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise form disclosed. Many modifications and variations are possible in light of the teachings above.

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The invention claimed is:

1. A checkout station comprising:

register stand;

a user interface attached to an upper portion of the register stand;

a platform coupled to a side of the register stand at a level below the user interface, wherein the platform has a top surface and a bottom surface; and

a U hook coupled to the bottom surface, wherein the U hook comprises:

a first side comprising a first elongate member having a first side first end and a first side second end opposing the first side first end, wherein the first side is coupled to the bottom surface using a first strap and a second strap;

a second side comprising a second elongate member having a second side first end and a second side second end opposing the second side first end;

a bottom piece comprising a third elongate member having a bottom piece first end coupled to the first side second end and a bottom piece second end coupled to the second side second end; and

at least one empty hanger, wherein the second side of the U hook receives the at least one empty hanger, and wherein the second side of the U hook collects and stores the at least one empty hanger.

2. The checkout station of claim **1**, wherein the first side is shorter than the second side.

3. The checkout station of claim **2**, wherein the first side, the second side and the bottom piece each have a circular cross section.

4. The checkout station of claim **3**, wherein the bottom piece is curved, and wherein the first side and the second side are straight.

5. The checkout station of claim **4**, wherein the first side and the second side are parallel to each other.

6. The checkout station of claim **4**, wherein the U-hook further comprises:

a disk shaped end piece coupled to the first side first end; and

a spherical shaped end piece coupled to the second side first end.

7. The checkout station of claim **1**, wherein the platform is coupled to a register stand first side, and a scale is coupled to a register stand second side.

8. The checkout station of claim **7**, wherein the platform is a first platform, and wherein the checkout station further comprises a second platform coupled to the register stand first side.

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